

COLUMBIA RIVER REGIONAL FORUM

TECHNICAL MANAGEMENT TEAM

November 19, 2008 Meeting

FACILITATOR'S SUMMARY NOTES ON FUTURE ACTIONS

Facilitator: Robin Gumpert

Notes: Erin Halton

The following notes are a summary of issues that are intended to point out future actions or issues that may need further discussion at upcoming meetings. These notes are not intended to be the "record" of the meeting, only a reminder for TMT members.

Review of Minutes/Agenda

The November 5th, 7th, and 12th facilitator notes and official meeting minutes were expected to be posted during the afternoon of 11/19; TMT will look to finalize these sets and the notes from today's meeting at the 12/3 TMT meeting.

Vernita Bar

Russell Langshaw, Grant County PUD, reported that an aerial survey had been conducted on 11/15, the first in a few years. Also, feasibility study preparation work was conducted on 11/16 and will continue on Sundays for the next 4-5 weeks. Langshaw said that a final redd count will be conducted on 11/23 and noted that he expected the minimum elevation target to be set in the 55-60 kcfs range. He added that based on counts thus far, the spawning numbers for this year will exceed pre-season estimates.

Action/Next Steps: Langshaw will provide a review/update at the 12/3 TMT meeting. Additionally, Paul Wagner, NOAA, planned to include a piece on Vernita Bar operations at the 2008 TMT year-end-review meeting on 11/21.

Chum Operations

Dan Feil, COE, referred TMT to the 11/12 COE teletype posted as a link to the TMT agenda. Also posted was a chum operations summary and graph for the dates 11/12-19. Feil clarified how the previous week's precipitation was reflected in the graph and noted that additional coordination with NOAA had been done during that time to make operational decisions. The graph indicated flow increases during nighttime hours followed by a return to daytime elevation targets. Paul Wagner, NOAA, and Dave Benner, Fish Passage Center (FPC), referred TMT to the FPC website, which showed 28 live, 4 redds and 2 dead chum were counted on 11/18. Most of the observed females were green, which indicates that the season is in an early stage.

Action/Next Steps: TMT will discuss Chum Operations and updated data from counts conducted during the week of 11/24 at their meeting on 12/3. If the need arises, there could be a conference call between now and then.

Albeni Falls Operations Update

Lynne Melder, COE, reported that Albeni Falls achieved its elevation target of 2051' and that the project will stay within a .5' operating range and pass inflows for the near term. Russ Kiefer, ID, reported that 959 Kokanee adult spawners had been counted thus far – a dramatic increase compared to last year's count of 325. Kiefer added that he was encouraged by the large size of the fish.

Action/Next Steps: Russ Kiefer, Idaho, will provide a spawning update at the 12/3 TMT meeting; TMT will discuss the feedback and “post-spawning” operations during the 12/3 meeting.

Snake River Zero Nighttime Flow

Tony Norris, BPA, referred TMT to graphs posted as a link to the TMT agenda. The graphs included January-February 2008 data regarding total hours at zero generation for each of the four lower Snake River projects, as well as the number of instances of exceedances and a histogram of all zero generation hours. As current passage counts show steelhead are still close to 300/day at Lower Granite, there was no recommendation at this time to implement zero nighttime flow flexibility; TMT will revisit this agenda item in December. Paul Wagner, speaking on behalf of the Salmon Managers, said that criteria developed by FPAC in 2005 will help guide discussions for this year. Scott Bettin, BPA, reminded TMT that video counts will continue through December this year, and asked whether this could provide an opportunity to test the effects of a shift to zero nighttime flow. Wagner said that as the effects would likely not be dramatic, the Salmon Managers would likely not propose this test.

Action/Next Steps: In reviewing the graph, Norris noticed an error in his selected range and said he would send a revised graph to the COE, for re-posting following the meeting. The COE planned to post the most recent passage data to the agenda later in the day on 11/19. TMT will discuss this agenda item at the 12/3 meeting.

2009 Draft Water Management Plan

Dan Feil, COE, reported that comments had been submitted by NOAA, WA, and USFWS; Russ Kiefer, ID, indicated that comments were en route to Feil.

Action/Next Steps: The COE will post all comments and a revised version of the Water Management Plan (WMP) to the TMT website. TMT will review the revised version at the 12/3 meeting and the document will need to be finalized by the end of the year. The COE planned to post the Fall/Winter Update to the WMP and the Fish Passage Plan as soon as they are made available for regional review.

Operations Review

Reservoirs: Grand Coulee was at elevation 1286.9' and Hungry Horse was at elevation 3528.98', with outflows of 1.3 kcfs. John Roache, BOR, followed up on the planned 11/12-13th outages at Hungry Horse to investigate the cause of the outage experienced back on 11/3 and to test plant protection circuits (Montana DEQ and Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks were notified): there was a slight TDG exceedance during the outage on

11/12, but none to report during the outage on 11/13. No further outages were planned. Libby was at elevation 2438.6', with inflows of 5 kcfs and outflows of 16 kcfs. Albeni Falls was at 2051.3' and continued to operate within a .5' range, as it has since 11/7. Dworshak was at 1524.9', with inflows of 3.2 kcfs and outflows of 1.6 kcfs. Seven day average inflows were 29.8 kcfs at Lower Granite, 112.2 kcfs at McNary and 128.2 kcfs at Bonneville. (Jim Adams, COE noted that on 11/14, flows at McNary were 152.6 kcfs and 165 kcfs at Bonneville.)

Fish: Paul Wagner, NOAA, referred to the FPC website and noted that the next few weeks look to be “prime time” for chum spawning. The COE noted that there will be a chum workshop hosted by Pacific Northwest Laboratories at the Skamania Lodge on 12/2. Wagner and other TMT members said they planned to attend and would bring any items of interest back to TMT for the 12/3 meeting.

Power System: Nothing to report at this time.

Water Quality: Nothing to report at this time.

Next Meeting: 12/3

Agenda items include:

- Vernita Bar Operations Review
- Chum Operations
- Albeni Falls Update/Post-spawning Operations
- Snake River Zero Nighttime Flow
- WMP – Edits Review
- Operations Review

Columbia River Regional Forum Technical Management Team Meeting Nov. 19, 2008

1. Introduction

Today's TMT meeting was chaired by Jim Adams (COE) and facilitated by Robin Gumpert (DS Consulting) with representatives of USFWS, COE, NOAA, BPA, BOR, Idaho, Washington, and others participating. The following is a summary (not a verbatim transcript) of the topics discussed and decisions made at the meeting. Anyone with questions or comments about these notes should provide them to the TMT chair or bring them to the next meeting. Meeting notes for Nov. 5, 7, and 12 will be reviewed at the next TMT meeting Dec. 3.

2. Vernita Bar

Aerial photos of redds taken Nov. 15 were unusually good, and the pilot saw as many redds this year as he's ever seen, Russell Langshaw (Grant PUD) reported. The final count was around 5,000 redds. Two types of surveys are

conducted, visual counts and rectified aerial photos. The photo technology gives a clearer view from 5,000 feet than the naked eye, allowing exact redd locations to be pinpointed. Langshaw will work with Paul Wagner (NOAA) to provide a summary report of this operation for TMT, and will give another update at the next TMT meeting on Dec. 3rd.

3. Chum Operations Update

Last week TMT revised the teletype instructions for this operation; the current teletype is posted to today's agenda, Dan Feil (COE) said. The second link to this item on today's agenda is a summary of the past week's operation, including tailwater levels and Bonneville discharges since Nov. 12. On Nov. 14, the situation came to a head, with target elevations about to be exceeded. The COE conferred with NOAA on the best plan of action to release flows in order to keep the tailwater elevation within the 11.3-11.7 foot target. The Bonneville tailwater elevation spiked to 16.5 feet that day, but the following day, flows were back under control.

Since Friday the situation has improved, with drier weather and stable elevations during daytime. The only spikes are at night, which means the COE still has to move water at night in order to maintain the target elevation during the daytime. Maintaining the forebay elevation was a challenge even when the COE had 4 feet of flexibility to work with, Tony Norris emphasized. Precipitation has been a classic problem for the chum operation, when heavy flows into Bonneville pool have nowhere to go and must be released. Earlier this season, the chum operation dodged a potential bullet when a weather front moved north.

Through Nov. 18, the Fish Passage Center counted 28 live chum and 2 dead ones. Dave Benner (FPC) guided TMT to chum counts on the FPC website, found under the chum tab at the bottom of the page. On Nov. 14, surveyors reported 28 fish, which is no increase from Nov. 10, Wagner noted. In addition, surveyors found that most of the females were green. This means it's still early in the season, a good thing, and the fish probably aren't late, compared to previous years' runs. Nevertheless this doesn't portend to be a great year, based on counts to date, unless the chum arrive all at once. The Hanford count, done the last week before Thanksgiving, is often the peak. Benner will add chum data for Nov. 14 to the FPC website. TMT will revisit this issue at its next meeting Dec. 3.

4. Albeni Falls

a. Operations. The target elevation of 2,051 feet was met Dec. 8 and the project has operated within a ½-foot range since then, Lynne Melder (COE Seattle) reported. The project is currently at 2,051.3 feet and passing inflows.

b. Kokanee Spawning. Idaho researchers have counted 959 redds to date, a huge rebound compared to last year's count of 325 redds, Russ Kiefer

(Idaho) reported. Furthermore, the fish were relatively large, indicating more eggs per female than usual. The COE has held the lake at the requested elevation, and now all that's needed are storms to clean gravel for next year's spawning. Kokanee spawning, monitored every few days, is still in progress. Kiefer will notify TMT when spawning is to be declared complete. TMT will revisit this topic at its next meeting, unless the end of spawning occurs before Dec. 3.

5. Snake River Zero Nighttime Flow

Tony Norris (BPA) led a discussion of zero generation during nighttime hours on the lower Snake River. This operation is traditionally included in the fall/winter update to the WMP. Norris explained three graphs linked to this topic on today's agenda: The first graph breaks down the total number of hours of zero generation last season (319), broken out by month starting January 1, 2008. The second graph shows the number of times (99) the operation went to zero generation. The third graph, a histogram showing usage per hour, is incorrect and will be updated and reposted.

Last year's discussion of zero generation focused on the number of fish passing ladders. Fish counts this year are twice what they were last year, with steelhead passage nearing 300 per day. Last year, the zero generation operation didn't start until fish ladders went out of service on Jan. 1, 2008. Norris proposed checking in on fish counts in mid-December, possibly starting the operation then.

Although zero generation occurs at night when typically migration ceases, much remains unknown about the characteristics of juvenile downstream passage at this time of year, Wagner (NOAA) said. It has been difficult to get precise information on how nighttime zero generation affects passage in cold weather when fish are less active anyway. In 2005, FPAC developed criteria for initiating zero generation based on a percentage of fish passing through Bonneville Dam, and passage counts have exceeded the criteria in previous Decembers. In recent years this issue has been settled by waiting for the fish ladders at Lower Granite Dam to go out of service.

Scott Bettin (BPA) suggested going to zero generation in December this year to see if any change can be detected in fish counts while the video cameras are still operating. Past studies have already looked at December passage, and any effects of zero generation would be too subtle to result in dramatic fluctuations, Wagner said. There was discussion of how to measure the impact of zero flow at nighttime when video counts occur only in the daytime. The issue is more one of how fish approach the project, so it might not show up in a fish count, Dennis Schwartz (COE) and Wagner agreed. Last year, video counts at Lower Granite were extended through December. TMT will revisit this issue at its next meeting Dec. 3.

6. Water Management Plan Update

The COE has received comments from NOAA and Washington. Dan Feil (COE) didn't update the plan for today because comments are still coming from Idaho, USFWS, and possibly others. The BiOp specifies that the WMP draft be finalized by Jan. 1, and the fall/winter update be released Nov. 1. There won't be significant differences in this year's fall/winter update from previous years, Feil said. TMT agreed this year's chum operation should be incorporated in the fall/winter update of the WMP. The final Fish Passage Plan, now being worked on, will be distributed in March as it has in past years. By Dec. 3, a draft of the WMP fall/winter update will most likely be available for another round of comments. TMT will review it then and possibly set a date for making it final.

7. Operations Review

a. Reservoirs. Grand Coulee is at elevation 1,286.9 feet, John Roache (BOR) reported. The primary driver of Grand Coulee operation is supporting chum spawning at this time of year.

Hungry Horse is at 3,528.98 feet with discharges of 1.3 kcfs. There was a lot of rain last week, and the reservoir is still filling as inflows come down. There were two 2-hour planned outages on Dec. 12 and 13, during which the hollow jet valves were used to maintain flow. Montana DEQ and Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks were notified of the planned outage. Use of the hollow jet valves increased gas levels on Dec. 12, when outflows were 2400-2500 cfs for a 2-hour period. Gas levels peaked at 110.3% and exceeded 110% for 1.5 hours. The downstream TDG monitor was still in place so that gas levels could be monitored during the outages. There are no other planned outages at this time.

Libby is at elevation 2,438.6 feet, with inflows around 5 kcfs and outflows of 16 kcfs.

Albeni Falls is at elevation 2,051.3 feet at the Hope gage. It has been operating between 2,051 and 2,051.5 feet since Nov. 7.

Dworshak is at elevation 1,524.9 feet, with inflows of 3.2 kcfs and outflows at a minimum flow of 1.6 kcfs.

The 7-day average at Lower Granite is 29.8 kcfs; at McNary, 112.2 kcfs; at Bonneville, 128.2 kcfs.

b. Fish. There was nothing to report today beyond the chum data discussed earlier. Live chum counts at Ives Island from 1998-2005 indicate that prime chum spawning time is typically from Nov. 16 to Dec. 4, so next week will probably bring the height of spawning activity. Dennis Schwartz (COE) will let TMT know if there are any in-season management implications that come out of an annual anadromous fish conference the COE is funding in Portland Dec. 8-12.

Schwartz will also keep TMT informed of SRWG research funding decisions that are now in progress.

c. Power System. There was nothing to report today.

d. Water Quality. There was nothing to report today.

9. Next Meeting

The annual TMT review of lessons learned will be Nov. 21, 2008. The next regularly scheduled TMT meeting will be Dec. 3, with a rerun of today's agenda: Vernita Bar operations; chum operations; Albeni Falls operations; Snake River zero nighttime flow; a WMP update; review of meeting notes for November 5, 7, and 12; and the standard operations review. This summary prepared by consultant and writer Pat Vivian.

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